vestigation. It has to constitute the basis of any library concerned with teaching biochemistry and may be of invaluable help for those who are ignorant in this field and want a brief and concise summary of this subject.

B. Swynghedauw

Biologically Active Ether Lipids

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Edited by P. Braquet, H.K. Mangold and B.B. Vargaftig

S. Karger; Basel, 1988

196 pages. £75.00

The discovery in 1979 that platelet activating factor (PAF) is an ether phospholipid reactivated interest in this group of lipids to the extent that they now merit publications such as this volume and the recently launched 'Journal of Lipid Mediators'. The book consists of seventeen short chapters and aims at a broad coverage of topics starting with chemistry in chapters on chemical synthesis and PAF antagonists, for instance, and finishing with an assortment of chapters on biological effects, mostly of PAF and mostly on the immune system. There is a sprinkling of chapters on other ether lipids and on other biological systems. The choice of the word 'sprinkling' is deliberate because the editors do not seem to have taken much effort in the organization of similar topics. For instance, closely related chapters on cardiac anaphylaxis and on shock are separated by four chapters on other topics. I feel that the editors could also have taken more care to ensure a greater uniformity of style between chapters.

There are two areas of interest to biochemists which, rather surprisingly, have been omitted. The first is a chapter on the biosynthesis of PAF and other ether lipids and their subsequent metabolism; the enzyme-catalysed steps in these pathways are quite well understood and presumably represent prime targets for prospective pharmacological control of the abundance of these lipids. The second omission is a chapter on the analytical methods used to identify and estimate the concentrations of ether lipids in tissues. It is also somewhat surprising that activation of platelet-aggregation by PAF scarcely rates a mention.

That having been said, the coverage of the book is generally good and the chapters are well-written introductions to their topics, each providing an up-to-date list of references which should enable readers to undertake a more detailed, independent literature review. The publisher's note on the back cover tells us that "It will be of value to biochemists... interested in surveying the latest information on PAF and other biologically active ether lipids." It is indeed for this purpose of *surveying* the information that this book is most appropriate; I feel that those wishing to study a subject in greater depth will find the treatment rather unsatisfying, although it should provide a useful starting point. At a breathtaking £75.00, however, I cannot see this slim volume finding its way into many personal libraries.

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